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Iran: Yarsan Minority a “Security Threat”

Islamic Republic: Yarsan Religious Minority a “Security Threat”

The death of Behnam Mahjoubi, who fell into a comma and died during his torture by Iranian authorities, has once again exposed the systematic harassment of Gonabadi dervishes by the Islamic Republic. But it is not just dervishes who are targeted. The Islamic Republic imposes severe restrictions and pressure on all religious minorities, denominations or schools of thought, for fear that they may rival the official Shia religion. One of these minorities is the “Yarsan” or “Ahle Haqq,” which have been called a security threat by military journals in the Islamic Republic.



Behnam Mahjoubi was one of thousands of dervishes who have been systematically persecuted by the Islamic Republic.

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Behnam Mahjoubi's body, an imprisoned Gonabadi dervish, was finally buried under tight security last week, on February 22, 2021, in his native village in Kerman province.

Mahjoubi was one of thousands of dervishes who have been systematically persecuted by the Islamic Republic and imprisoned – a situation that has only worsened since a dramatic attack by authorities on Gonabadi dervishes in 2018 in Tehran's Golestan neighborhood.

Police and Basij militia forces attacked a rally of dervishes in March 2018 in front of the house of Noor Ali Tabandeh, the center of the Gonabadi community, during which dozens of dervishes were arrested and imprisoned. The government's relationships with the dervishes became more hostile after this incident. Mohammad Salas, one of the dervishes at the rally, who had been accused of murder, was executed by the governments. Others were jailed.

In the twenty years since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, dervishes have had limited freedom to practice their religion. The policies on dervishes tightened in 2005 and the government removed even the slight freedom of holding ceremonies as it completely suppressed the dervishes.



Yarsan or Ahle Haqq is a peaceful esoteric religion whose followers live mostly in western Iran and believe in reincarnation and dissolution.

Dervishes in Iran, like many other groups, have become a security issue in the eyes of government officials. Their actions and

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behavior – even innocuous ones – are often considered a security threat and can lead to imprisonment.



A recent report published in Iran's [Scientific Quarterly Journal of National Security](#), affiliated with the National Defense University, examines this view of dervishes and other mystical Sufi groups, showing why the Islamic Republic has a negative view of them and suppresses their activities.

The study, "Explaining the Threat of the Ahle Haqq Sect," seeks to show why followers of the "Yari religion" also called the or the "Ahle Haqq" or "Yarsans" are a "security threat." The report estimates that the Yarsan population is about 500,000 people who live mostly in western Iran.

Ahle Haqq is an esoteric religion whose followers live mostly in western Iran and believe in reincarnation and dissolution. It is sometimes conflated with the "Ali-Allahism" religion.

The report explicitly names "Ahle Haqq" and other mystical or religious groups in Iran as sects that "disrupt the functioning of religion, disrupt ideological unity, undermine political stability, create security problems and spread violence," and therefore must be "managed."

The Yarsanis, like the followers of other religions in Iran, are under systematic pressure from the government. They have formed a council to deal with the restrictions and violations of their basic rights in an effort to end the increasing pressures and to pursue their demands.

The National Defense University argues that Yarsanis became a "security threat" in 2013 with the formation of the Yarsan Civil Activists Advisory Council – an allegation that had previously been made by other law enforcement officials. The Council formed itself as a response by the Yarsanis to the 2013 self-immolation of several Yarsanis in Iran. The Yarsanis had taken the extreme steps as a means to pressure Iran's government to give in to their demands.

The report claims that the Yarsan Council's call for protests and their request to the government to stop harassing Yarsans were among the most egregious examples of its "anti-security" actions.

The report also cites the support for Gonabadi dervishes by the Yarsan Civil Activists Advisory Council and its messages to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to state demands as other “anti-security” measures.

The report also criticized some of the Yarsan Council’s statements in social, cultural and economic affairs. And it examined 49 positions taken by the Council in recent years, claiming that Yarsanis have undergone a transformation and “metamorphosed” into a group “making irrational demands on the political system”.

“Gradual acceptance of extremist ideas,” the “elimination of moderate elements” and “expansion of ties with the Kurdish regions of Iraq” in the body of the Council are three other signs that the report authors cited to argue that the Yarsanis had transformed into a security risk.

In 2013, the Psychological Operations [quarterly](#) of the Basij paramilitary organization published a report against the Yarsanis and made similar claims against its followers.

The quarterly claimed that “the population of Ahle Haqq has increased religious heterogeneity in Kermanshah province” and that their “differences” with Sunnis and Shias could exacerbate “insecurities.”

The dominance of such an antagonistic attitude throughout official structures at various levels of government in the Islamic Republic has led to widespread violations of the rights of religious minorities in Iran, including the Yarsanis, over the past 40 years.

The ruling clerics of Iran, who claim to be the promoters of the Shia religion, do not even allow another branch of Islam, the Sunnis, which has a significant population in the country, to freely practice their religion. The rights of Sunni Muslims are routinely violated. Iranian officials restrict any religion, denomination or school of thought they believe could rival the Shia religion and do not allow the followers of these faiths to practice their beliefs.

Article by [BEHNAM GHOLIPOUR](#)

Courtesy: [IranWire of 3 March 2021](#)

 Patrick Harrigan  November 11, 2022

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